

**CALIFORNIA POSTSECONDARY EDUCATION COMMISSION**

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**Testimony of Howard Welinsky, Chair  
California Postsecondary Education Commission  
to the California Performance Review Commission  
Meeting on September 9, 2004**

I am writing this as the Chair of the California Postsecondary Education Commission (CPEC) to express our concern and opposition to the California Performance Review (CPR) recommendation that would eliminate CPEC and transfer its functions to a new Higher Education Division under the Secretary for Education and Workforce Preparation. The purpose of this testimony is to outline for you the unique advantages and value added by CPEC under its current structure, how that value would be lost if the CPR recommendation is implemented, and to offer suggestions to strengthen CPEC.

***Background***

CPEC is the state's higher education planning and coordinating agency. Its primary responsibilities are to advise the Governor and the Legislature on policy and fiscal issues affecting California education beyond the high school level and to serve as a repository and disseminator of information concerning all aspects of California education beyond high school. CPEC conducts independent, non-partisan analysis of issues affecting California higher education and provides policy recommendations to both the executive and legislative branches of state government.

The Commission is composed of 16 members – three appointed by the Governor, three appointed by the Senate Rules Committee, three appointed by the Speaker of the State Assembly, one representative from each of California's educational systems, and two student representatives. This composition ensures a variety of viewpoints that inform the Commission's actions, and provides the general public with a forum to express its concerns regarding the direction and future of California higher education.

CPEC believes that the CPR team did not have a complete understanding of the unique role played by CPEC when it recommended that it be eliminated and its functions consolidated with other higher education entities into a new Higher Education Division within a proposed new Department of Education and Workforce Preparation. We question whether the process employed by the CPR was guided by what was in the best policy interests of the state. We question the rationale for creating a new Department of Education and Workforce Preparation that would be under the direction of a new Secretary of Education and Workforce Preparation. And, finally, we question the appropriateness and effectiveness of expanding the scope of the current State Board of Education to include expanded policy responsibilities over higher education matters, since pre-K-12 education issues already overwhelm the Board.

### ***Disadvantages Associated with the CPR Consolidation Proposal***

CPR suggests that the proposed consolidation of higher education functions would result in enhanced policy and program coordination, improved accountability, and the elimination of overlapping responsibilities among the affected entities. While some of these benefits might occur, the following disadvantages would likely result:

1. The state would no longer have access to independent and objective analyses to assist policymakers in developing sound higher education policies, since CPEC's current functions would be under the exclusive control and direction of the executive branch of state government;
2. CPEC's existing higher education policy, planning, and coordination responsibilities would likely take a "backseat" to the day-to-day responsibilities associated with administering educational programs and regulating educational institutions;
3. The state would no longer have advice and input from the state's higher education community nor from the general public in the development of higher education policy recommendations;
4. The state's higher education agenda and direction would be limited to that identified by the executive branch and might not represent the broad spectrum of needs of Californians, but might rather reflect a more political agenda and direction; and
5. Higher education policy recommendations that represent the best policy interests of the state and its citizens could easily be replaced with recommendations and actions that are more politically desirable by the administration currently in office.

### ***Advantages Associated with CPEC's Current Structure***

CPEC's current structure provides the state with advantages that would be lost if the proposed consolidation were implemented. For example, the state's ability to obtain independent, objective, non-partisan higher education policy analysis and advise would be significantly compromised if CPEC's functions were transferred and consolidated as proposed. Such a loss could significantly impact the future availability and effectiveness of California's higher education. Student access to a higher education could be redefined, and budgetary considerations could be subject to political negotiations. Some of the other key benefits to the state associated with CPEC's current structure include:

1. CPEC is independent from both the executive and legislative branches of state government and, as such, is not subject to undue political pressure or influence from either;

2. CPEC is able to devote its entire attention to matters of higher education policy, planning, and coordination without being distracted with the day-to-day responsibilities associated with administering programs or regulating institutions;
3. CPEC has direct input from the state's higher education community through segmental governing board members who serve on the Commission, along with its two student representatives;
4. CPEC is able to develop its own agenda and workplan (subject to budgetary and data/information limitations) consistent with the needs of the state and its policymakers;
5. CPEC provides objective and non-partisan information to assist state policymakers in developing sound higher education policies through its analyses and databases; and
6. CPEC is expected to advance what is in the best policy interest of the state and its citizens, not necessarily what is most politically desirable.

### ***CPEC Opposes the Proposed Consolidation But Supports Change***

Recognizing (1) the aforementioned benefits of CPEC's current structure, (2) the minimal fiscal savings anticipated to be realized through the proposed consolidation, and (3) the loss of independent, objective, non-partisan higher education policy analysis and advise that would result if the consolidation proposal were implemented, CPEC believes that it is in the best interest of the state to maintain a stand-alone higher education planning and coordinating agency much like it is now structured.

CPEC recognizes the ideas surrounding the proposed consolidation and is open to change. CPEC would actively and vigorously support legislation to strengthen and expand its authority. Specifically, CPEC would be more effective in carrying out its higher education planning and coordinating responsibilities if state law were amended to provide it with:

- Authority to require the state's public colleges and universities to provide any information and data requested by CPEC;
- Responsibility for reviewing each system's budget proposals;
- Authority to approve or disapprove the implementation of new academic programs proposed by the state's public colleges and universities;
- Authority for the oversight and governance of intersegmental educational programs; and
- Authority over a higher education accountability structure that assesses the effectiveness of the State's public colleges and universities in meeting the needs of California citizens and its employers.

Finally, recognizing that ongoing self-examination is imperative to the continued effectiveness of any organization, CPEC is currently examining how it can best structure itself and its work to assist the state and its policy leaders in ensuring the quality and sufficiency of future postsecondary education opportunities. In fact, CPEC is currently developing a proposed accountability framework that would hold the state's public higher education systems accountable for their performance in meeting broad statewide goals.

CPEC shares the CPR expectation to maximize the state's return on its higher education resources and to ensure that our state's educational programs are aligned with the needs of our citizens and employers. CPEC stands ready and willing to assist the CPR Commission and representatives of the Administration in ensuring that Californians have the educational opportunities that best address our state's workforce needs.